

10 February 1966
Saigon

Dear Mrs. Rose,

I came to Vietnam with General Lansdale's team at the end of August, 1965 and had the privilege of knowing your husband in the last few weeks of his life. I don't use the word "privilege" as a mere formalism. After a year of working on Vietnam policy problems in Washington, I grabbed at the opportunity to come to Vietnam because I wanted to earn the feeling of having done something for the people of this country and I felt the need to know much more first-hand of their problems. In my search for people from whom I could learn, I heard Jerry's name from everyone. I made a date with him for dinner and talked with him half the night.

My first impression of him hasn't changed: over the last five months I haven't run into anyone in this country more perceptive about the nation's problems, more dedicated to solving them, or with greater sympathy and love for the people of South Vietnam. His photographs in "The Face of Anguish" reveal his own feelings so poignantly, they seem somehow to have been taken through his own eyes.

It turned out that my job was to involve liaison with Minister Ung's Ministry of Rural Construction, and since Jerry worked with Ung as well as Bui Diem I looked forward to working closely with him. The Lansdale team was particularly interested in measures that could bring the government and the people of Vietnam closer together, and I found Jerry a mine of ideas, since that was exactly his own concern. He mentioned, among many other things, that he had proposed to Prime Minister Quat a program of secondary school scholarships to rural children, but that the notion had been buried in the bureaucracy when the Quat Government was replaced.

Soon after Jerry's death, we were asked by the Ky Government to suggest economic and social measures to implement immediately, and I seized the opportunity to suggest this program: in my own mind, I wanted as much as anything else to see it as a memorial to Jerry. Prime Minister Ky accepted the notion, and announced almost immediately a program of several hundred rural secondary school scholarships, to be awarded in every province on the basis of need and ability. Nothing could symbolize better Jerry's desire to change the lives and enlarge the opportunities of the people in the Vietnamese countryside, and to press the evolution of a government concerned for the welfare of its people.

Many of Jerry's ideas -- e.g., on the need and desire for representative government, and on the dangers and costs of corruption in Vietnam -- sounded over-idealistic to Americans who didn't know as much as he did about conditions in Vietnam or the true desires of the Vietnamese people. They sounded good to the members of Lansdale's group.

I liked Jerry very much. We were about the same age, and we saw many things the same way. I respected his knowledge of Vietnam and dedication to its cause, and I like his love affair with the people and children of Vietnam (which I soon began to share). The night he was due, I thought, to come back from his trip with Ung, I went up to his apartment to ask him out to dinner. But he wasn't due till the next morning. The news at noon the next day hit me very hard. I don't know if one is ever prepared for news like that -- until now, I hadn't had to find out -- but I know I wasn't ready for it this time, and I found myself very vulnerable to it.

Soon after that I was laid up for a day with a fever, and the next day, recovering in bed, I wrote a letter to a friend to convey the feeling and color of life in Vietnam. My mood in the letter was heavily conditioned by Jerry's death: by the violence and contingency of our life here that it revealed. He showed it to a number of mutual friends, and one of these, in the Defense Department, wrote me to ask if he might see about having it published. I agreed, on condition that it be anonymous and was approved by the government. Before hearing from him again, I decided to put in more about Jerry and sent some additions back; but by a misunderstanding, the letter was abridged, cleared by Defense and State and set in print without consulting me again. Not only were my additions too late, but those clearing it had deleted all names and cut down the passages dealing with specific individuals, including Jerry. In this form, it appeared in the January 13 edition of The Reporter Magazine, as "Vietnam Diary." I don't have a copy to send you -- my only clipping seems to be lost -- but I will ask The Reporter to send you some copies.

There is a paragraph in the piece referring to a group of "dedicated ones, fanatics on Vietnam," whom I obviously admired and thought of as very important to our effort here. Jerry, of course, was a key member of that group; others like Takoshi Oka, Gerry Hickey, Mack Prosser, John Vann, Ev Bungardner, Frank Scotton, Phil Werbiski and Doug Ramsey were all friends of Jerry's and respected him greatly. I'm sure you've heard their names from Jerry. (Vann, the Province Rep in Hau Nghia mentioned in the notes as having just escaped a mining, has since come through other attacks unhurt; but Doug Ramsey, his assistant, has just been captured by the VC. The Province Rep in Chau Doc mentioned in the notes -- saying to me, "How can they ask you not to get involved!" with his arms full of little Vietnamese girls -- was blown up by a mine and is back in a Stateside hospital. To be involved here, as all these men were along with Jerry, is to travel through the countryside: and that is dangerous business.) As much as the others, I find myself often saying, "What Jerry Rose said about that was ..." which must sound odd to those who know what a short time I knew him.

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I am taking the liberty of enclosing the check which I received from The Reporter for this piece. I had had some thoughts of using it here in Vietnam in some fashion in Jerry's name, but some mutual friends reminded me of you and the children: and as a Father, I know that children are always short of cash. So this is for them.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Ellsberg

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c/o Mr. Harry Rose,
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